

South Dakota National Guard

Public Affairs Office

Phone: 605-737-6721 Email: ng.sd.sdarng.list.pao@mail.mil Web: sd.ng.mil



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National Guard mechanics vital in pilots, flight crew safety

By Spc. Kristin Lichius - 129th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

RAPID CITY, S.D. – Aviation mechanics play a vital role in ensuring the safety of the National Guard's pilots and flight crews. In the South Dakota Army National Guard, it is the mechanics of the Rapid City-based Detachment 1, Company B, 935th Aviation Support Battalion, who provide high-level aviation maintenance and repair support for the aircraft and aircraft systems.

"This unit plays an absolutely critical role in aviation support," said Chief Warrant Officer 3 Seth Mendel, 935th detachment commander. "What we do can't be taken lightly because we have peoples' lives in our hands."

Every 360 flight hours, aircraft go through a phase maintenance inspection. This involves major disassembly and inspection of critical components. Worn or damaged components are then repaired or replaced as the aircraft is put back together. This process can take up to two months to complete.

"This job is important because we ensure these aircraft are safe," said Staff Sgt. Ryan Thorson, a general mechanic with the 935th. "We want our flight crews to be confident they're safe, and that they can rely on their equipment."

The detachment is made up of general, shops, and avionics mechanics. Each type of mechanic specializes in inspecting and repairing different equipment and systems on the aircraft.

"We're a small, close-knit unit and are able to cross-train many of our Soldiers," said Staff Sgt. Calvin Schmidt, the detachment sergeant of the 935th. "Cross-training helps build camaraderie in the unit and gives our Soldiers a unique opportunity to learn and appreciate each other's skills."

To become a mechanic, most Soldiers spend three or more months in training, learning about the aircraft. Mechanics who specialize in working with electrical or avionics attend a longer training.

"I love this job," said Spc. Kyle Pfeifle, a general mechanic with the 935th. "Not everyone can say they get to work on Black Hawk helicopters, and the people in the unit are great."

While aircraft maintenance and repair is often a behind the scenes role, the SDARNG aviation mechanics play a big part in helping save lives by ensuring the reliability and efficiency of the Army's aircraft.

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High-resolution photos are available at www.flickr.com/photos/southdakotationalguard



170525-Z-BP728-028: U.S. Army Spc. Ben Walker, a general mechanic with the South Dakota Army National Guard's Detachment 1, Company B, 935th Aviation Support Battalion, and Spc. Matt Irwin, a crew chief with the Company C, 1st Battalion, 189th Aviation Regiment, create a sheet metal template at the SDARNG aviation facility in Rapid City, S.D., May 25, 2017. The mechanics utilize sheet metal to fabricate replacement parts for the aircraft. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Kristin Lichius)



170525-Z-BP728-022: U.S. Army Spc. Mark Heintz, a general mechanic with the South Dakota Army National Guard's Detachment 1, Company B, 935th Aviation Support Battalion, inspects the tail rotor of an HH-60 Black Hawk helicopter at the SDARNG aviation facility in Rapid City, S.D., May 25, 2017. Aviation mechanics thoroughly inspect each aircraft to ensure proper functioning during flight. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Kristin Lichius)



170525-Z-BP728-021: U.S. Army Spc. Kyle Pfeifle, a general mechanic with the South Dakota Army National Guard's Detachment 1, Company B, 935th Aviation Support Battalion, disassembles the rear portion of an HH-60 Black Hawk helicopter at the SDARNG aviation facility in Rapid City, S.D., May 25, 2017. Aviation mechanics thoroughly inspect each aircraft for damage to ensure proper functioning during flight. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Kristin Lichius)



170525-Z-BP728-008: U.S. Army Spc. Mark Heintz, a general mechanic with the South Dakota Army National Guard's Detachment 1, Company B, 935th Aviation Support Battalion removes safety wire to prepare a tail rotor paddle for further inspection at the SDARNG aviation facility in Rapid City, S.D., March 25, 2017. The inspection of the rotor blade paddle is a part of routine maintenance inspections performed on the HH-60M Black Hawk helicopters. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Kristin Lichius)



170525-Z-BP728-024: U.S. Army Spc. Mark Heintz and Spc. Kyle Pfeifle, general mechanics with the South Dakota Army National Guard's Detachment 1, Company B, 935th Aviation Support Battalion, disassemble and inspect an HH-60 Black Hawk helicopter at the SDARNG aviation facility in Rapid City, S.D., March 25, 2017. Members of the 935th perform general repairs and inspections periodically to ensure the aircrafts are safe to operate. U.S. Army (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Kristin Lichius)

FOR MORE INFORMATION contact the SDNG Public Affairs Office at (605) 737-6721 or e-mail ng.sd.sdarng.list.pao@mail.mil